

Today, as we enter into the sixth year of the war in Iraq, we should take a moment to reflect on the past five years and the toll that this conflict has taken on our country. Our nation finds itself embroiled in an overseas commitment that is defined by unrelenting violence and marked with little progress. This war has left our economy fragile, our military strained, and most tragically, far too many of our brave service men and women lost or injured. For the past five years, the President has demanded funding for this war at the expense of American families. Spending \$9 billion per month in Iraq, the President has chosen to saddle our children and grandchildren with unprecedented debt while slashing domestic priorities such as education, health care, and national security. For example, his budget for next year contains \$70 billion for war, yet cuts \$83 million in grants to New York to prevent and respond to terrorist attacks and other disasters.

Furthermore, the President has left our nation's military readiness in a state of crisis. Under the enormous strain of repeated tours of duty, we have witnessed the depletion and degradation of our armed forces. In fact, two-thirds of our combat brigades are not ready for deployment, leaving America vulnerable to unforeseen crises at home and elsewhere in the world.

As we consider the ramifications from this protracted conflict, we must honor those who have sacrificed in service to our nation. Over the past five years, close to 4,000 U.S. soldiers have died and nearly 30,000 have been wounded - with thousands more suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries. Our men and women in uniform have proven time and again that they are the bravest and most selfless of all Americans and deserving of our eternal gratitude. However, simple thanks are not enough.

We have an obligation to ensure that our troops have the resources they need while deployed overseas and the services they deserve when they return home. To that end, this Congress has provided billions of dollars to procure and replace the equipment that our troops need to do their jobs. Furthermore, Congress is working to address the needs of our veterans by increasing access to critical services. Recently, we passed the Wounded Warriors Act which addresses the problems experienced by wounded service members and their families through the recovery process.

After five long years, engagement in this war has held serious consequences for our nation and we must work to bring it to a close. Last year, I reaffirmed my opposition to any more funding except what is required to protect our troops or to bring them home. We must change the course of this war out of respect for the service of our men and women in uniform, to repair our economy and national security, and to ensure that our children and grandchildren live in a safe and prosperous United States.

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